NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

# Field Border

## *Conservation Practice Job Sheet 386*

Photo credit: Dr. L.W. Burger, Jr., Mississippi State University

## Definition

Field borders are strips of permanent vegetation established at the edge or around the perimeter of a field. Vegetation consists of adapted grasses, legumes, and/or shrubs.

## Purpose

A field border is used to reduce soil erosion from wind and water, protect soil and water quality, manage harmful insect populations, or provide wildlife food and cover.

## Where used

Field borders are located at the edges of crop fields and can connect to other buffer practices within fields. They may also apply to recreational land or on other land where agronomic crops are grown.

Minimum field border widths are based on local design criteria specific to the purpose or purposes for installing the practice. Field borders consist of adapted species of permanent grass, legumes, and/or shrubs. Native species are desirable. Field borders are more effective and provide more environmental benefits when planted around the entire field. Plants that attract beneficial insects can increase the population of beneficial insects that prey on harmful ones. Photo credit: Dr. L.W. Burger, Jr., Mississippi State University.

## Resource management system

Field borders are normally established as part of a conservation management system to address the soil, water, air, plant, and animal needs, including wildlife, and the owner's objectives. Field borders used with contouring, contour stripcropping, cross-slope farming patterns, or terraces eliminate the normal planting of end rows or headlands in uphill and downhill directions. Field borders also provide a turning area for farm equipment, which reduces sheet, rill, and gully erosion. In addition, field borders can provide forage production and improve farm aesthetics. They are most effective when used in combination with other agronomic or structural practices to provide conservation benefits.

## Wildlife

Field borders can enhance wildlife objectives. Benefits depend on the vegetative species used and management practiced. Consider using adapted native vegetative species that can provide food and cover for important wildlife. Increase width, if needed, to provide necessary protection for nesting animals from predators. Also increase width to protect wildlife if a portion of the field border will be used for equipment movement or turn rows. Delay mowing of grassed area until after the nesting season for ground-nesting birds and animals. When managing field borders for wildlife, never disturb (such as mowing or disking) more then 50 percent of the field borders surrounding a field in any one year.

## Operation and maintenance

Inspect and repair field borders after storms to fill in gullies, remove sediment, reseed disturbed areas, and take other measures to ensure the effectiveness of the border. Do not mow or burn during the nesting season (normally May through July) to protect ground-nesting wildlife. In place of mowing, consider other vegetative management techniques, such as "wickbar" herbicide applicators or prescribed burning. In areas with adequate moisture, lightly disk the field border on a 2- or 3-year cycle to promote growth of native vegetation.

## Specifications

Site-specific requirements are listed on the specifications sheet. Additional provisions are entered on the job sketch sheet. Specifications are prepared in accordance with the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide and the Field Border practice standard (386).

# Field Border – Job Sheet

Landowner_____ Field number_____

| Purpose (check all that apply) | |
|---|---|
| □ Reduce erosion from wind and water | □ Management of harmful insect populations |
| □ Soil and water quality protection | □ Provide wildlife food and cover |

| Layout | Field border 1 | Field border 2 | Field border 3 | Field border 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Border width (feet) | | | | |
| Border length along edge of field (feet) | | | | |
| Area (acres) | | | | |
| Slope (%) | | | | |
| Species #1 | | | | |
| Species #2 | | | | |
| Species #3 | | | | |
| Species #4 | | | | |
| Seeding rate (pure live seed – lbs/acre) | | | | |
| Lime (tons/acre) | | | | |
| N (lbs/acre) | | | | |
| $P_2O_5$ (lbs/acre) | | | | |
| $K_2O$ (lbs/acre) | | | | |

**Site Preparation**

*Prepare a firm seedbed. Apply lime and fertilizer as indicated by soil testing. Additional requirements:*

**Planting Method**

*Drill grass and legume seed _____ inches deep uniformly over area. Establish vegetation according to the specified seeding rate. If necessary, mulch newly seeded area with _____ tons per acre of mulch material. A small grain crop may be needed as a companion crop at the rate of _____ pounds per acre (clip or harvest before it heads out). Additional requirements:*

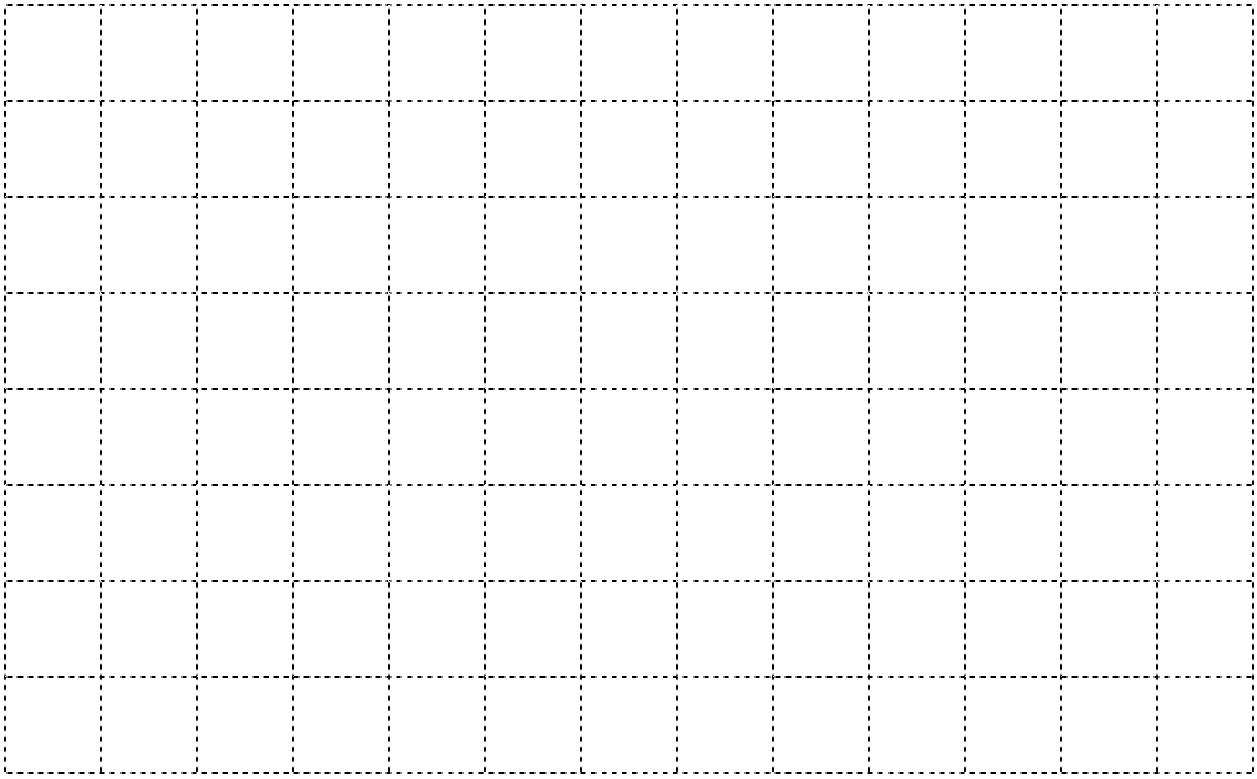
**Operation and Maintenance**

*Maintain original width and length of field border(s). Harvest, mow, reseed, and fertilize as necessary to maintain plant density and vigorous plant growth. Inspect after major storms, remove trapped sediment, and repair eroding areas. Shut off pesticide sprayers when turning on a field border. Additional requirements:*

## Field Border – Job Sheet

If needed, an aerial view or a side view of the practice can be shown below. Other relevant information, complementary practices and measures, and additional specifications may be included.

Scale 1"=_____ ft. (NA indicates sketch not to scale: grid size=1/2" by 1/2")



| Additional Specifications and Notes: |
| --- |
| |
| |
| |
| |
| |
| |

**The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in its programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs and marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact the USDA Office of Communications (202) 720-2791.**

**To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.**